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ABSTRACT

"Human relations," in its specific frame of reference, has come to mean majority-minority relations. This paper discusses human relations in both its broader as well as in its narrower focus. In human relations, the problems that develop are fairly consistently a function of emotions, and in the area of emoticnal issues, the school board must assume a leadership role. Unfortunately, the problems of prejudice complicate the task of school boards and administrators in developing effective programs to deal with human relations. However, in dealing with prejudice, boards should (1) acknowledge the limitations of people and the role of prejudice; (2) assure the system of good management and effective supervisory practices; (3) acknowledge the power of expectations, particularly in the area of human relations; and (4) become involved in whatever programs are developed. Specific examples of various approaches to the problem used in several different human relations programs are cited, and the paper closes by providing some guidelines for dealing with the "gap" of understanding between people. (Author)

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THE SCHOOL BOARD'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN RELATIONS PROGRAMS

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These are times when words and phrases which used to have a singularly clear meaning now have different connotations. Such is the case with the common expression about things "going to pot!" Similarly, the term "human relations" has come to have a rather specific frame of reference, a definition which now refers primarily to majority-minority relations, especially interracial relations.

Psychiatry is a medical specialty which is concerned with human relations in its broader context, with breakdowns in the capacity of people to relate to one another. Yet, the principles which are involved in those breakdowns can be identified in the problems of "human relations" in its narrower focus. In my remarks, I therefore wish to consider the School Boards' Responsibilities in Human Relations from the broader as well as the narrower context.

My clinical work in psychiatric hospitals and in prison, as well as my work with the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, has given me considerable exposure to mankind's inadequacies in human relations. My work with VISTA and the Peace Corps has, in contrast, exposed me to some most remarkable

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and successful illustrations of positive human relations.

As I have thought about other aspects of my own experience with this subject of human relations, and with particular reference to the setting of public education, I should note that I am a product of the public school system which spawned Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. With the exception of two years which I spent in a segregated junior high school in Washington, D. C., my elementary and secondary education was in the Topeka public schools. The elementary grades were segregated -- that was the issue challenged in the Brown case; the high school years were integrated academically, though not socially.

Before proceeding, I wish to make one other personal observation as part of my introduction. Approximately three years ago, my wife decided she wanted to do more with her talents than just raise our six children. She ran for, and was elected to our local school board, to be the only woman on the board, the first in twelve years. Observing her activities from my vantage point as a school board widower, I have inevitably become more aware of the intricate problems facing school boards.

I will share with you today some ideas about approaching some of these problems, but I do so as a "consultant" -- an individual who may offer some new perspective on a problem from the outside, but who recognizes you school board members have the responsibility to put this perspective in your context and make your own decision about its value and what to do about it. You are the individuals elected by your constituents to assume the responsibility for decision making. I expect no less

of my wife, who makes her own decisions in fulfilling her obligation as an elected official.

School boards are in a middle ground, with a responsibility to represent public concerns to the school system, and to represent educational concerns of the system to the public. In this boundary position, the board must assume a leadership role and be prepared to acknowledge "the buck stops here." Indeed, I am impressed how often the political system, with various checks and balances, presents opportunities to pass the buck. Regrettably, too many people prefer to sidestep and find a scapegoat, too few are willing to stand up and be counted.

In human relations, the problems which develop are fairly consistently a function of emotions. Emotional issues are evident in all of the public's confronting school boards -- students, staff and teachers, the public at large. Man is called a "rational animal," and yet as we look about us, we must inevitably have doubts. It seems more appropriate to call us "emotional" animals. Clearly, the most powerful forces that motivate us are our emotions, which are not especially "rational." It is impressive to observe the careful rationalizations which we make to justify our actions, our prejudices, our feelings. More often than not, the truth is that we don't know why we do many things which are actually prompted by some irrational, emotional need within us.

Actually, it is our emotions which represent the complicating factors in our adjustment in life. We can get along pretty well with one another as long as we

can keep on an intellectual plane. But we do have feelings about many many things, feelings which are manifest often in some form of prejudice against one or another characteristic of others -- race, religion, sex, hair length, cleanliness, etc. Since prejudice in one form or another is at the heart of the problem of human relations, it may be well to dwell a moment on this subject.

We like to believe that all men and women are created equal. As much as we might wish to sustain this idea, by Constitutional amendment or otherwise, we must acknowledge that there are real differences between and among sexes. There are, of course, many imagined differences above and beyond the "real" differences which exist; and there are many feelings engendered by both the real and imagined differences. The feelings which develop tend to be experienced in the context of "haves" versus "have-nots." The "haves," as they become aware of the existence of "have-nots," tend to defensively protect themselves, fearing the loss of what they have. The "have-nots," meanwhile, as they become aware of their "lack," may resent this status of being without or something less, and ever strive to make up for their deficiency.

The sense of being a "have" or "have-not" takes place in many different ways, related to one's sex, race, socio-economic status, etc. This is a process which develops from early childhood as we become aware of ourselves and the world around us, and we come to make distinctions. During childhood, we are also inevitably affected by the basic "have-not" status of childhood, living in the land of the giants, being relatively helpless. As our personalities develop, we develop various ways to cope with the threatening world and our fears. We may simply deny that

any differences exist and rely on childish fantasies of magical power. We may displace our feelings of inadequacy onto someone else who has "less" or who in some way can be seen as less adequate. In that way, we learn to elevate our own self-esteem by putting someone else down. Indeed, we may aggressively attack others to prove our own adequacy. There are many techniques which people develop in subtle and unconscious ways as they grow up. Regrettably, these patterns of behavior may continue to be significantly evident in a person's behavior long after he or she has achieved a physical maturity, and no longer realistically needs to behave in a protective or aggressive manner.

I have dwelt upon this point to illustrate some of the basis for the inevitable prejudice we all have. I am reminded of a question put to me by a high government official one time, when he asked, "How can we eliminate prejudice?" We can't, any more than we can eliminate all disease or all maladjustment. We can attempt to understand the basis for our prejudices, and acknowledge that the precise biases which we have, whether racial, sexual, religious or other, are determined by complex influences, including our parents and the society in which we live.

Beyond the power of emotions and the role of our prejudice, there are several other aspects of human personality functioning which affect our human relations. One psychological mechanism that is often apparent is the "logic-tight compartment" which is a means for us to conceal from ourselves logical inconsistencies in our thoughts and behavior. This is the mental process by which we split issues and separate them in such a way that we don't see the hypocrisy in our behavior.

Let me illustrate with two recent examples of this splitting. Two weeks ago, the President's Commission on Drug Abuse and Marijuana issued a report that, simply stated, said that smoking marijuana in the privacy of your home should be perfectly legal -- as long as no one gave it to you, sold it to you and you didn't grow it yourself! Beautiful doublethink! It should be legal and yet it can't be legal!

Or, considering a subject that has been very much in the public mind, examine the attitudes toward busing. For years busing has been an acceptable means of bringing students to school, as long as it has involved rural students, private school students, or blacks. Indeed, when I attended junior high school in Washington, D. C., I had to ride the bus 30 to 45 minutes each way each day, and nobody got too upset about that. But when busing becomes a means by which integration is to be achieved, it becomes a no-no! More specifically, one is confronted with the logic-tight compartment reasoning of the Florida voters, who overwhelmingly voted in favor of the principle of equal education -- 79% in favor; and then turned right around to vote overwhelmingly against the only way currently devised to accomplish equal education, busing -- 76% opposed.

The fact is, we want to have our cake and eat it too. It is all too easy to vote "for" equal education, until one faces the consequences of that policy -- and then it is clear the majority of the public is not really in favor of paying the price for equal education, the price being higher taxes and some physical inconvenience in mixing students, either by busing or open housing or some comparable means. And who is really kidding whom when someone tries to say our reactions are not a function of prejudice.

No less a reflection of the intensity and irrationality of emotions in passing judgment on one another is the reaction to long hair in adolescent boys. It is striking how much energy and emotion have been spent on this issue in school board meetings, court cases, etc. Yet we know that there is no correlation between hair length and academic capacity. And we are all aware that long hair has never been questioned as long as the person with it has been female. With a Constitutional amendment assuring equal rights for women, one wonders why the young men have not challenged hair length codes on the grounds of equal rights!

All too often, there appears to be a wish not to know or understand such issues; in that way, the official or administrator can have the freedom to turn loose the emotions on these symbolic issues. Thus we can get hung up on dress codes, busing, sex education, or any number of issues that have provoked such intense emotionalism. "Don't confuse me with the facts; my mind's made up." This attitude is one which many people take toward controversial issues, with great distress if the schools attempt to teach students about controversy.

These represent just a few of the problems underlying the subject of human relations, problems which complicate the task of school boards and administrators in developing effective programs to deal with the subject. The first responsibility of the school board therefore is to acknowledge the limitations of people, and indeed of school board members. As one of my colleagues put it, much as we might like to do so, we cannot simply will to stop using prejudice to solve our conflicts; we can, however, will to be alert to our prejudice.

The second responsibility of the school board is to assure the school system of good management. Many organizations suffer from management problems and especially a lack of effective supervision of personnel. School systems, because of the nature of teaching and the relatively limited supervision that any given teacher may receive, are particularly vulnerable to charges of poor supervision. In most instances, supervisors (principals) are reluctant to confront persons with their weaknesses. It is easy to compliment employees, but hard to criticize them. Most of us don't like to hurt others and we perceive criticism as hurting. Yet the reality is that it is when people really do care about you that they will tell you of your errors. It takes real caring to call attention to mistakes. It is the poor supervisor who temporizes and avoids confronting an individual with his deficiency.

Supervision is particularly vulnerable when prejudice is involved. In recent years, in an attempt to compensate for years of too few minority teachers, there have been efforts to hire more. But in the process, there is often a parallel reluctance to provide good supervision for such individuals. Thus, supervisors may operate with such feelings as it not being appropriate to get angry with supervisees; it is inappropriate to hire a failure and therefore there should be no failures; and one should love all blacks. Yet most blacks will observe that they don't want to be loved; they just want to be treated honestly, with respect. And good supervision must inevitably require occasional confrontation.

A third responsibility of the school board is to acknowledge the power of expectations, particularly in the area of human relations. This point has been

illustrated effectively in an experiment carried out in San Francisco schools, published in a book entitled Pygmalion in the Classroom. What was impressively demonstrated was the degree to which a teacher's expectations of a pupil performance will bias the student's actual performance. After psychologists gave a series of tests to students, they identified a number of students as "sleepers" who could do much better than they had been doing. The teachers were informed of these "sleepers." A year later, the students were retested, and indeed, a significant number of these "sleepers" had improved beyond the level which might be expected on the basis of chance alone -- and the hooker was that the initial tests really showed nothing. The psychologists just randomly selected certain students as "sleepers" and biased their teachers. What is evident is that expectations can profoundly affect human interaction, both in a positive and a negative direction. Thus, if teachers expect little, they are likely to get little -- and when the student is poor, minority, etc., the expectations may be determined accordingly.

How can we achieve effective human relations? Where does one begin? All too often, grandiose plans are developed which attempt to involve many citizens at the grassroots level. Yet our experience in work with business and industry has clearly demonstrated that one has to start at the top, with the primary decision-makers. If the board and the chief administrators are not a part of the process and if they do not endorse a program with their full participation, it is limited in how far it can go.

Therefore, a fourth responsibility of the school board is not only to make a

commitment to human relations in words, but to become involved in whatever programs are developed.

A word is in order to review the key element of any human relations effort. Briefly stated, it is a commitment to get people together so that they can accept one another and find commonality as human beings. In times of conflict, we are repeatedly confronted with adversary issues which tend to divide people, to polarize them to opposite sides of an issue. The challenge of human relations is to bring people back together to discover our commonality.

As I speak of commonality, I am reminded of three statements which convey the basic theme of human relations. The first is the magnificent statement by Shylock in Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice." Although Shylock is vengeful in his making a contract which demands a pound of flesh from his debtor upon default of the debt, he is keenly sensitive to discrimination against Jews. And he says:

> ...I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufference be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villany you teach me, I will execute; and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.
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> Merchant of Venice, Act III,i, 64-69.

The second statement which comes to mind is an Indian prayer which observes,

"Great Spirit. Grant that I may not criticize my neighbor until I have walked a mile in his moccasins."

The final quotation which I would cite is from Dr. Karl Menninger's Love Against Hate:

> The world is made up of people, but the people of the world forget this. It is hard to believe that, like ourselves, other people are born of women, reared by parents, teased by brothers, adored and importuned by sisters, solicited and threatened by playmates, exhorted and reproved by teachers, courted by lovers, consoled by (spouses), worried by children, flattered by grandchildren, and buried by parsons and priests with the blessings of the church and the tears of those left behind. It is hard to believe that there are not some supermen and some archfiends who manipulate the rest of us and guide our destiny and waves of the future, than to consider the ways we determine our own fate, right now and in the immediate past and future.*

These are the principles which underlie any human relations effort, and the task of any successful program in human relations is to get people together where they can talk -- or in today's youth vernacular, "rap," -- and get to know one another as individuals, rather than as images.

Let me cite five approaches to this problem which might serve as models for a human relations effort. The first was an approach developed to help a community in crisis, a university town of 30,000 people which had experienced racial problems in the high school, fire-bombings of downtown businesses, a half-million dollar fire

*Menninger, Karl A., Love Against Hate. New York, N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace and Co. 1942, p. 4

in the university student union, and two people killed, one by police bullets, another in a public group by unknown bullets.

This project involved an outside, catalytic group coming into the community to identify and involve representatives of all the diverse groups in the community in sitting down in a good faith attempt to identify the real problems of the community and come up with suggestions for improvement. The consultants had to identify and contact the real power structure in each of the diverse groups -- blacks, hippie street people, businessmen, Indians, college students, university administrators, university faculty, city administrators, police, human relations commission members and resident conservatives.

From these groups, a steering committee was formed, and that group participated in the first of ten scheduled 24 hour workshops in a neutral setting. That group then was responsible for recruiting participants for the subsequent workshops. The workshops would start with the structured task of defining the problems of the community, and end with the structured task of recommending solutions. As one observer commented, "between the two tasks was unstructured chaos." But in that unstructured chaos, the participants learned how different people thought and felt about the problems, and they discovered that some of the differences were more imagined than real. The leadership of the groups was provided by the outside consultants, with one black and one white group coordinator who functioned to keep the discussion going.

As one participant later stated, "I think that last year made people aware of the lack of communication and the lack of trust, but I'm sorry it had to come the radical way. I think it helped when we sat down and found out that people's problems aren't that different."

A second approach to the human relations problem was experienced in an industry setting, where a company was challenged by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for discrimination. The company had not really considered itself to be biased or to have human relations problems, but upon examination, the problems became apparent. The approach here was a seminar type of approach, where there was an opportunity to verbalize openly some of the fears and anxieties which personnel had about the racial issues. Part of the task was becoming aware of the subtle operation of prejudice, particularly as it affected supervision. Also evident were the myriad ways that people use to avoid conflict and avoid facing uncomfortable feelings and ideas.

Working in the educational setting, a third approach to human relations involves a kind of simulation experience, the so-called Operation Sunshine, which was developed by an organization known as Interact in Lakeside, California. This activity is a highly structured exercise which includes some role playing and attempts to put individuals in other peoples' shoes with students arbitrarily being "born" as citizens in Sunshine by drawing tags from a hat in the front of the classroom with identities of race, education, job, income and address. As the Sunshine guide explains the process, Sunshine "simulates a typical American community of 50,000 moving

toward and through a racial crisis. Because of their 'birth' as Negro or white at the beginning of the simulation and because of what happens to them in their simulated community, students become concerned about the racial issues boiling around them in the classroom. Suddenly sensing somewhat how Negroes and whites feel, they find they must commit themselves to act." The process is a four-week educational unit which has been effectively applied in a high school setting.

Another effective human relations program developed in a junior high school setting had, as its key, utilization of resource persons from the community which the school served, a mixed community. Utilizing a particularly effective black mother as a seminar leader, with the support of a strong principal, a ten-session seminar was developed for a group of some 40 students who signed up on a voluntary basis for the elective, non-credit, non-graded experience. The sessions were scheduled twice weekly during school time, meeting during the first hour period in the first week, the second hour the second week, etc., through the fifth week, in order to minimize the extent of the absence of the students from any one scheduled class.

The subject matter of the seminar began with a discussion of the rationale for the sessions, and then sessions on minority history -- Black, Mexican-American, Indian, etc. The sessions included some degree of simulated experience, e.g., at one session, all the students and visiting parents, teachers, etc., had their hands tied together as they entered the room. They were tied to each other and then led to a small area where they sat on the floor and had their legs also tied. While being

obligated to sit up straight, on the floor, they then listened to a lecture on slavery and the transportation of slaves -- black and white -- to early America. They became doubly sensitive to the humiliation of slavery. Consistently, the sessions are mixed lecture and discussion, with free interruption by students' questions.

On final illustration: In one school district where a massive desegregation program took place, the number one priority identified was the need for understanding others. Human relations workshop clusters were established, based around each high school and its feeder schools. The total of six cluster workshops in the school disctrict involved every K-12 public school in the district. The workshops involved certified and classified personnel, parents, and some students getting together in understanding sessions. The opinion was that unless all of the school family got together, the prospects for resolving problems were minimal.

These are just a few ideas -- there are many others, all with the common theme of getting people together to experience their commonality and to dispel the misperceptions and biases which can be so readily maintained when people are kept apart.

In our complicated world, we continually search for a simple answer; and it is frustrating to discover that there is no simple answer. There is the challenge to keep searching for understanding, however, in order to contain some of the emotionalism which is so rampant. As a guideline in this search, let me close with some words which I prepared for the report of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention

of Violence. These words were prepared to suggest things we can do to resolve some of the so-called generation gap, but the same principles apply in dealing with any "gap" of understanding between people.

> It is important to acknowledge openly the existence of problems ... when they occur. Too often, people are so threatened by conflict in opinions that they refuse to acknowledge a contrary view, and suppress that challenging view.
>
> It is imperative for all parties to listen carefully and respectfully to one another, with sincere consideration for differing opinions or ideas. Listening is not an easily practiced art.
>
> Stated issues are often a red herring. At times, conflicts cannot be resolved until underlying causal issues are identified and dealt with.
>
> The resolution of any conflict will be profoundly affected by the expectations of the adversaries. If leaders are perceived ... as unreasonable and are approached with that expectation, the leaders are themselves provoked into being unreasonable, and vice versa.
>
> All must acknowledge the inevitability of change. The older generation can wear itself out trying to fight the tide, or it can turn the energy of youth to advantage for the benefit of all.
>
> Resolution of conflict depends upon finding areas of agreement. Instead of emphasis on differences, which promotes polarization, it is necessary to identify points in common, such as the fact that people seek a voice in determining their destiny and dignity as human beings.
>
> As a society founded on the principle that every individual has certain inalienable rights and privileges, it is important to keep the value of the individual high, in spite of the population explosion and the complications of modern society.

About the author..

W. Walter Menninger, M.D., age 40, is a psychiatric member of the third generation of the family which founded the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas, a non-profit institution for treatment, education, research and prevention in psychiatry. Currently, Dr. Walter is a senior staff psychiatrist on leave from the Menninger Foundation to serve as the director of the Combined Services Section of Topeka State Hospital, a 400 bed general psychiatric service with day treatment and outpatient services. He also is the Acting Director of Residency Training for the institution, which is one of the three primary teaching hospitals affiliated with the Menninger School of Psychiatry.

His professional activities, in addition to clinical and administrative work, include consultation with the local police department, and with the Federal Bureau of Prisons; and lecturing in the Department of Preventive Psychiatry at the Menninger Foundation. He is the editor of Psychiatry Digest, an abstracting journal which goes to over 20,000 psychiatrists in the United States and Canada. He is a member of the National Health and Safety Committee of the Boy Scouts of America. From 1967 to 1971, he was a member of the 12 member National Advisory Health Council to the Department of HEW in Washington; and in 1968, he was appointed by President Lyndon Johnson to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. He is a Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, a Fellow of the American College of Physicians, and a member of the Committee on Mental Health Services of the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry.

Dr. Walter has been widely sought for public addresses, and has keynoted such conferences as the National Institute on Crime and Delinquency, the National Association for Journalism, and meetings of state mental health associations and state school board associations. He addressed the 87th General Assembly of the State of Tennessee in joint session, and has spoken to the National Press Club in Washington, D. C.

In the past year, Dr. Walter has spoken to two regional NSBA meetings, as well as conventions of Iowa and Wisconsin School Board Associations, discussing "Change: Threat or Challenge?" His wife, Constance L. Menninger, is an elected member of the Board of Education for Unified School District #501, Topeka, Kansas.